

Background and History of Los Gatos

LOCATION

The Town of Los Gatos is nestled at the base of the Sierra Azules, and is located approximately 60 miles south of San Francisco, in the southwestern portion of Santa Clara County where the Santa Clara Valley meets the lower slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Los Gatos is bounded by the City of San Jose to the north and east; the City of Campbell to the north; the Cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga to the west; and unincorporated County of Santa Clara and the County of Santa Cruz to the south.

The Los Gatos Planning Area encompasses a wide variety of terrain, ranging from flat topography at the edge of the valley floor to densely wooded hillsides. Both the valley and hillsides are interspersed with creeks, streams and riparian habitat. The sharp contrast between the valley floor and the hillsides provides the Town's picturesque background.

HISTORY

Los Gatos is one of Santa Clara County's oldest communities. In 1840, the Mexican government granted a land patent for a 6,600 acre rancho to Sebastian Peralta and Jose Hernandez. Los Gatos was originally named *La Rinconada de Los Gatos* (Cat's Corner) by early settlers due to the screams of mountain lions prowling in the night. In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho was selected as a town site. The Town was incorporated in 1887, and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,652. When the first General Plan was adopted in 1963, the Town had grown to an area of approximately 4,000 acres, or 6.3 square miles, with a population in excess of 11,750.

At the time the first General Plan was revised in 1971, the Town had grown to an area of 9 square miles with a population of 24,350. In 1984, Los Gatos covered approximately 10 square miles and had a population of 27,820 persons. Today, the Town population is estimated to be 28,592 in a 14 square mile area. While most of the growth through the 1970's was due to new development, most of the growth in the 1980's and 1990's was due to annexations, in-fill development and changing demographics.

The Town originally developed at a distance from other population centers and therefore evolved as an independent community having residential, commercial and industrial areas. The economics of the Town have changed from the wheat farming, milling, logging, orchard and cannery businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the suburban, "high tech," visitor destination businesses of today. The railroad also played a major role in the growth and development of the Town, Los Gatos was either the terminus of the railroad or the transition point from standard to narrow gauge at more than one time during the railroad's operation. The climate and easy access by rail from San Francisco made Los Gatos an early tourist destination. Today, the Town is situated within the largest metropolitan area of northern California, and is closely tied to Silicon Valley and its fast paced economy. Los Gatos, however, retains a mix of residential, commercial and light industrial uses, still attracts visitors, and continues to retain its small town image.

Los Gatos prides itself as a “self contained community.” Over 300 businesses serve the residents and act as a destination point for visitors who are attracted to its restaurants, hotels and variety of shops within a pedestrian oriented downtown setting. The Town is also an “inclusive” community with the full mix of ages, family sizes and incomes. Los Gatos has many parks and greenbelt areas, as well as a vibrant downtown area. Downtown Los Gatos is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the model of what communities strive to achieve in a downtown.

Historical Reading Material

- Bennett, Mardi, ed. Images of Long Ago: A Century of People, Places and Progress in the Town of Los Gatos.
- Bloomfield, Anne. Los Gatos Toll House: Historic Structures Report.
- Bruntz, George, G. History of Los Gatos.
- James Alexander Forbes, builder and owner of the Santa Rosa Flour Mill on the Rancho Rinconada de Los Gatos. (Author Unknown)
- Wulf, William A. A History of the Santa Cruz Mountains and early Los Gatos.

* Source: Town of Los Gatos General Plan

Town Government Structure: Putting Boards, Commissions, and Committees Into Context

COUNCIL/MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

The Town of Los Gatos operates under the Council/Manager form of government, a system that combines the policy leadership of elected officials in the form of a Town Council, with the managerial expertise of an appointed Town Manager.

The Town Manager is appointed by the Council and serves as the chief administrative officer of the organization. The Town Manager is responsible for administration of Town affairs, day-to-day operations, and implementation of Council policies according to State Government Code outlined in sections 2.30.255- 2.30.305 of the Town Code.

The Town Attorney, also appointed by the Council, advises and represents the Town and Council in all legal affairs.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Town Council

The Town Council is the legislative body for the Town of Los Gatos. Five (5) members are elected to serve staggered four (4) year terms. The Council elects one of its members annually to serve as Mayor. The Town is a General Law City operating under the provisions of the State Government Code.

Town Clerk

The Town Clerk serves a four (4) year term and is responsible for providing various services required by the Town Code and State Government Code for General Law Cities. The Clerk's primary duties include managing the Town's legislative history and providing information and referral services. The Town Clerk also serves as the Elections Official for the Town.

Town Treasurer

The Town Treasurer serves a four (4) year term and is responsible for activities as mandated in the Town Code and the State Government Code. The Treasurer is the custodian of all Town funds and is responsible for the Town's investments and bond services.

TOWN SERVICES

Town Manager's Office

The Town Manager provides overall administration, leadership and direction for the Town organization. The Manager identifies community issues and the needs requiring legislative policy decisions; provides alternative solutions; assures that the Council's policies, programs and services are effectively and efficiently provided; prepares the Town's budget with recommendations on the appropriate resources for Council action; provides research and information necessary for responsible decision-making; fosters public awareness of municipal programs, services and goals; responds to citizen inquiries by explaining Town services and functions; investigates problems and provides specialized assistance in the Redevelopment project area development. The Town Manager's Office is also directly responsible for personnel, finance, budgeting, purchasing, labor relations, management information systems, cable television, risk management, equipment replacement, and worker's compensation.

Town Clerk's Office

The Town Clerk's Office serves as a comprehensive repository of information for Town Departments and the Los Gatos community. A major objective of the Office is to preserve the total legislative and recorded history of the Town government and make it readily available to the general public, other agencies and Town staff.

Town Attorney

The Town Attorney is the legal advisor to the Town Council, staff and Redevelopment Agency. The Town Attorney processes and evaluates all claims against the Town and manages all litigation involving the Town. The Town Attorney is also directly responsible for self-insurance.

Community Development

The Community Development Department is responsible for all current and advanced planning, redevelopment, building inspection and plan check activities of the Town. Program areas include Administration, Development Review, Code Compliance, Advanced Planning/Special Projects, Building Inspection/Plan Check and Redevelopment. The Department supports the Planning Commission, Town Council and Redevelopment Agency and Historic Preservation Committee, as well as other advisory commissions, such as the General Plan Committee, Architectural Standards Committee, and Community Development Committee.

Police

The Los Gatos/Monte Sereno Police Department provides public safety services to the Town of Los Gatos and the City of Monte Sereno. The principal aims of the Department are to reduce crime through prevention, detection and apprehension; provide for safe and orderly movement of vehicular traffic through traffic calming strategies, enforcement, accident prevention and investigation; to provide public safety through regulation and control of hazardous situations; to

recover lost and stolen property; and to prevent crime through programs reflecting community needs. The Department also emphasizes a strong police/community partnership through innovative programs such as Reserve Police Officer, Volunteers in Policing (V.I.P.), Disaster Aid Response Team (D.A.R.T.), Police Chaplin program, Parking Citation Hearing Officers, and the Police Explorer Scout program.

Parks and Public Works

The Parks and Public Works Department engages in the maintenance and operation of parks and public improvements, and management of construction projects in the following major areas:

- Street pavement, sidewalks, curbs and gutters, medians, and street lights
- Parks, trails, urban forests, playgrounds, play fields, and play lots
- Sanitary sewer systems
- Storm drainage systems
- Public facilities, equipment, parking structures/lots and private buildings
- Traffic control devices and features
- Automotive services for Town vehicles and equipment

Community Services

The Community Services Department serves as the center for programs which enrich the life of the community. The Department is committed to the following:

- Identifying and responding to the needs of a diverse population, with programs that serve seniors, youth, families, homeowners, renters and low income residents.
- Promoting a spirit of hometown community by including volunteers and program participants as integral parts of ongoing projects.
- Facilitating communication between local human service providers in order to increase effectiveness and to continually improve programs through shared expertise.
- Managing Town compliance with a variety of federally-mandated programs, targeting those resources toward identified local priorities.

Library

The Los Gatos Public Library serves as the Town's primary provider of information services and as a center for cultural enrichment and lifelong learning. The Department's goals are to provide collections and services which anticipate the needs of the community; encourage an interest in reading and learning; support students and the elementary and secondary level with appropriate materials and services; provide the current library related technologies and training; create a welcoming environment for children which encourages their curiosity, imagination, creativity and a permanent love of reading; and provide a knowledgeable and service-oriented staff that is responsive to the community's need for access to a world of information and ideas. The Library provides current, high-demand, high-interest materials in a variety of formats for people of all ages, as well as more traditional resources. Dedicated to the spirit of a learning community, the Library provides a year around series of children's programs and a Summer Reading Club, a book discussion group for adults and Internet classes that are popular with many seniors.

Boards, Commissions, Committees

The Town of Los Gatos currently has several advisory groups categorized as a board, commission, or committee. Each has a specific focus and serves to make recommendations to the Town Council on issues related to that specific field. A Town staff member has been appointed to each commission, committee or board to serve as liaison between the Town Manager and the commission.

Members of commissions are volunteers who are appointed by the Town Council and serve at the pleasure of the Town Council.

Town of Los Gatos Commission, Committee, and Board Descriptions

The Town of Los Gatos has a variety of volunteer commissions, boards and committees whose purpose is to act in an advisory capacity to the Town Council of the Town of Los Gatos. Members of those boards and commissions are appointed by the Town Council.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission advises the Town Council on land use matters such as General Plan, specific plans, zoning code amendments and zone changes. In addition, the Commission takes action on architecture and site applications, conditional use permits, subdivisions and other land use applications that are not assigned to the Development Review Committee. The Commission assists in planning for the future physical development of the Town and informs and educates the public on current land use and urban planning issues. Although the Planning Commission does not make legislation, it does act to interpret and enforce local land use legislation when making determinations on proposed project applications.

Arts Commission

The Arts Commission encourages the development of art, drama, music and other creative activities in the Town of Los Gatos, including the annual Music in the Park concert series.

Art Selection Panel

The Art Selection Panel makes recommendations to the Arts Commission regarding the acceptance and placement of art work and renewal or non-renewal of loaned art work. The Panel also reviews inventory of potential art work placement locations suitable for Public Art installation.

Architectural Standards Committee

The Architectural Standards Committee reviews and makes recommendations to the Planning Commission concerning a variety of proposed changes to Town design standards for private development.

Board of Appeals

The Board of Appeals meets annually to hear appeals of Building Regulations.

Community Services Commission

The Community Services Commission ensures that the goals and objectives of the Human Services Element to the General Plan are implemented by regularly assessing the housing and human service needs of the community.

Conceptual Development Advisory Committee

The Conceptual Development Advisory Committee advises prospective applicants of whether his/her project is consistent with adopted Town land use policy prior to initiating the development review process.

General Plan Committee

The General Plan Committee provides assistance to the Planning Department and Town Council on all matters relating to the General Plan or any Specific Plan.

Historic Preservation Committee

The Historic Preservation Committee advises the Planning Commission concerning major matters pertaining to historic preservation. Determines and issues approval for minor exterior alternations to a historic structure.

Library Board

The Library Board represents the community in making recommendations regarding Library services.

Parks Commission

The Parks Commission advises in all matters pertaining to public parks, grounds, street trees, off-road trails, and Town beautification.

Personnel Board

The Personnel Board hears appeals submitted by employees in the competitive service relative to disciplinary action or alleged violation of the Town ordinance.

Rent Advisory Committee

The Rent Advisory Committee reviews the rental mediation ordinance and regulations, and makes recommended changes needed to meet new conditions or in response to the changing community environment.

Transportation and Parking Commission

The Transportation and Parking Commission advises the Town Council on matters pertaining to transportation and parking in the Central Business District.

